



Summary

Firearm¹ injuries are the third leading cause of injury death for Washington children 10-17 years old. Firearm injury rates were highest among males 15-17 years old. Most (91 percent) of the firearm deaths among Washington children were intentional. The majority (73 percent) of all the deaths occurred in the home of the child, a friend, or a relative. Firearms used in most of the child deaths in Washington State were not stored safely. About one quarter of twelfth graders surveyed reported that it was easy to get access to a handgun.

Restricting access to guns by children is paramount. Promoting proper gun storage practices and creating community coalitions to develop, implement, and monitor a local plan to reduce the number of locations in which youth have access to guns are promising solutions.

REAL STORIES INVOLVING FIREARMS AND WASHINGTON CHILDREN

Barry, a 16-year-old, under the influence of methamphetamines, died after being shot while fleeing in a stolen car.

Lonnie, age 15, committed suicide by shooting himself in the head with a rifle belonging to the family. He was upset about having to move and told several friends and a teacher that he was going to commit suicide.

Alicia, a 13-year-old, shot herself after an argument with her parents. She had been grounded due to a recent criminal charge of minor in possession of alcohol. The loaded and unlocked pistol was available in the parent's bedroom.

Aaron, age 16, had been playing Russian roulette with other friends present. He had removed all bullets but one, and on the third try he shot himself.

¹ Firearms include handguns, shotguns, hunting rifles, and military firearms, but not explosives.

- **See Suicide and Homicide chapters for additional firearm prevention strategies.**
- If you have firearms in your home:
 - Store firearms unloaded, locked up, and out of children's reach. Store handguns in a lockbox with a push button lock. Use trigger locks for rifles and shotguns. Better yet, use a large gun safe that stores both handguns and long guns.
 - Store ammunition in a separate, locked location.
 - Keep gun storage keys and lock combinations hidden in a separate location.
 - Teaching children NOT to handle or to stay away from guns is NOT enough.
- Check with neighbors, friends, or relatives – or adults in any other homes where children visit – to ensure they follow safe storage practices if firearms are in the home.
- If older youth are allowed access to firearms for sport, they should take firearm safety training courses and store guns locked when not in use.

*PREVENTION STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNITIES**FIREARMS*

- Promote safe storage of guns and ammunition. Medical and social service professionals should ask about firearms and encourage safe storage practices to keep firearms away from children and teens.
- Develop community coalitions that bring together law enforcement, public health, child protective services, parent groups, firearm owners, and others to develop, implement, and monitor a local plan to reduce access to guns and provide temporary safe storage when temporary removal of the firearm from a home is necessary.
- Create community coalitions to identify and support children and families at risk of firearm violence.
 - Promote broad distribution of information about risk factors related to childhood depression and family violence.
 - Educate teens about managing life stresses, seeking help, and developing healthy options to address stress.
 - Promote awareness of and screening for childhood and adolescent depression.
 - Provide effective support services for children in various settings.
 - Develop and use programs that support children and teens after school.
- Current laws that restrict access to firearms should be enforced. This includes removing firearms from the possession of those charged with or convicted of a certain misdemeanors and felonies, enforcing waiting periods and criminal background checks, and ensuring that identification is not falsified by minors who want to obtain a firearm illegally. Also, people over 18 who are legally purchasing a firearm but are in turn selling or giving it to a minor should be provided information about the legal ramifications of such a transaction.
- Child Access Prevention (CAP) laws are another promising strategy to prevent injury and death of children caused by firearms. CAP laws are intended to make guns inaccessible to children by holding adults responsible for improperly stored firearms. Part of the effectiveness of CAP laws is in raising public awareness about the danger for firearms in the home and encouraging safe storage of guns as an injury prevention measure.
- Promote zero tolerance of firearms on school property.

Number of Injuries²

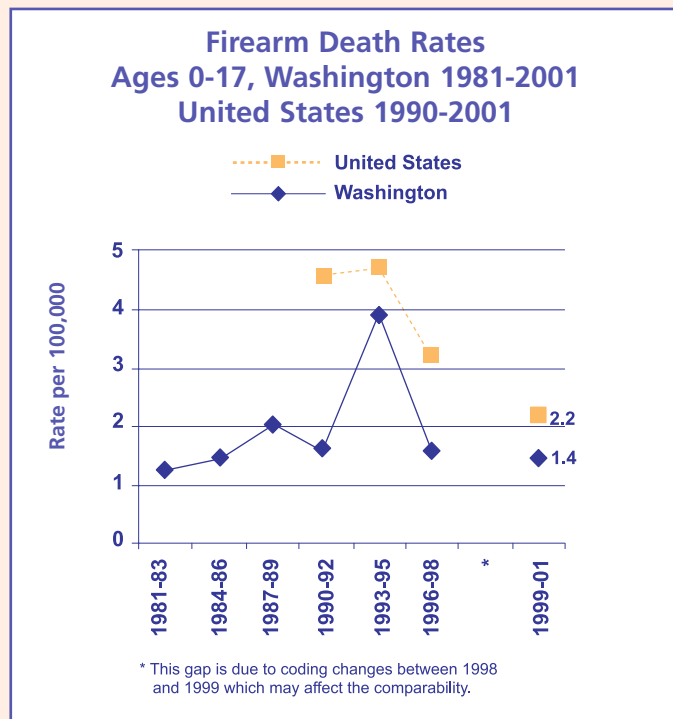
During 1999-2001, firearm injuries were the third leading cause of injury death for Washington children 10-17 years old. For Washington children 0-17 years old, firearm injuries account for an annual average of:

- 22 deaths.
- 24 hospitalizations.
- About 170 visits to a hospital emergency department.

Time Trends³

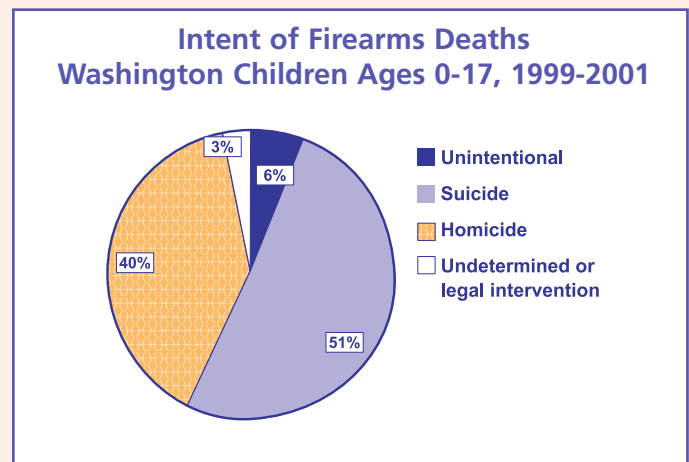
There was no change in the firearm death rates for Washington children 0-17 years old, from the three-year time period of 1981-83 to 1999-2001.

Since 1990⁴, Washington State firearm death rates have been lower than those nationally. The national and Washington trends are parallel, showing a peak during 1993-1995 and a decline since that time.

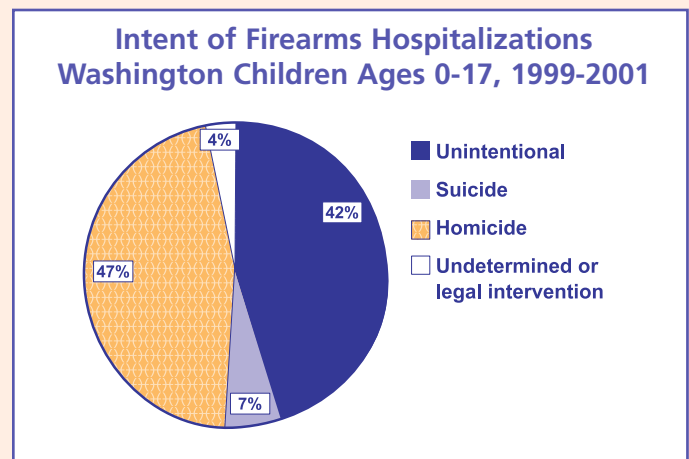


Intent

Among Washington children 0-17 years old the majority of firearm deaths (51 percent) were suicides, and about 40 percent were homicides.



Many of the firearm hospitalizations among Washington children 0-17 years old were homicide attempts (47 percent), and about 42 percent were unintentional shootings.



² Unless otherwise specified, data are for firearm injuries among Washington children 0-17 years old during 1999-2001. Rates are per 100,000 children who are Washington residents.

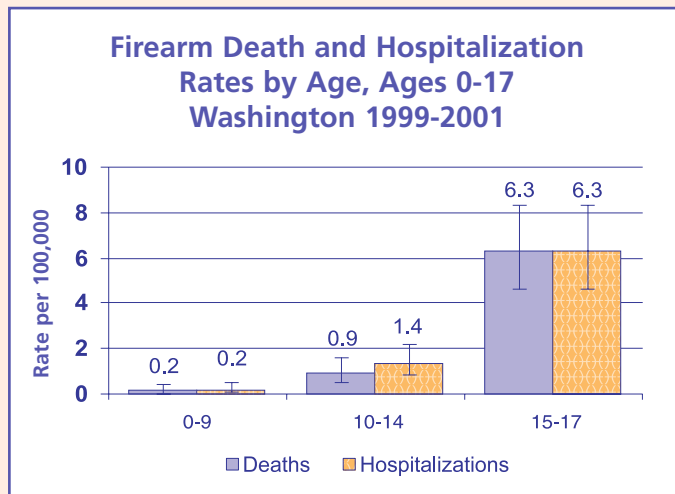
³ See Comparability Ratio section in Appendix D.

⁴ National injury death rates for children 0-17 years old are not available prior to 1990.

Age and Gender

The 15-17 age group had the highest rate of deaths and hospitalizations from firearms.

Males 15-17 years old had a firearm death rate three times higher, and a hospitalization rate almost seven times higher than females of the same age.



Access and Weapon Carrying

Data from the 2000 Washington State Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System show that approximately 288,000 Washington households with children have firearms, and an estimated 562,000 children (about 37 percent) live in a household with firearms. For about 132,000 children, the firearm in their household is unlocked, and for about 27,000 children, the firearm is both unlocked and loaded.

Data from the 2002 Washington Healthy Youth Survey show that about 26 percent of twelfth graders, 22 percent of tenth graders, and 17 percent of eighth graders responded that it was easy to get a handgun.



About 6 percent of eighth, tenth, and twelfth graders reported that they carried a weapon, such as a gun, knife, or club on school property, and about 3 percent reported they had carried a gun in the past 30 days.

Local child death review teams reviewed 60 out of the 65 firearm deaths during 1999-2001.

Key findings include:

- Forty-four (73 percent) of all the deaths occurred in the home of the child, a friend or a relative.
- The most common firearms used were handguns used in 38 (63 percent) of the deaths, and rifles or shotguns, used in 16 (27 percent) of the deaths. The type of firearm used was unknown in 10 percent of the deaths reviewed.
- Thirty (50 percent) of the firearm deaths reviewed were suicides, 25 (42 percent) were homicides, four (7 percent) were unintentional, and one was undetermined.
- In three deaths (5 percent), the firearm was known to be locked, and the key was not stored with the lock.
- The ammunition was stored with the firearm in 27 (45 percent) of the 60 deaths.
- Impairment by or use of alcohol and/or other drugs was noted in 20 (33 percent) of the deaths. The youth was impaired in 18 (30 percent) of the deaths, supervising adult in two, perpetrator in one, and another individual in one.⁴
- Fourteen of the 25 firearm homicides (56 percent) were committed by someone the child knew.
- Eight of the 60 children (13 percent) who died were known to have a family history of domestic violence.
- Teams concluded that 82 percent of the 60 firearm-related deaths were preventable, 7 percent were not preventable, and the teams were unable to determine preventability for 11 percent.

⁴ Persons impaired may total more than the number of deaths because more than one party could have been impaired.